

HISTORY

THE REAL STORY BEHIND

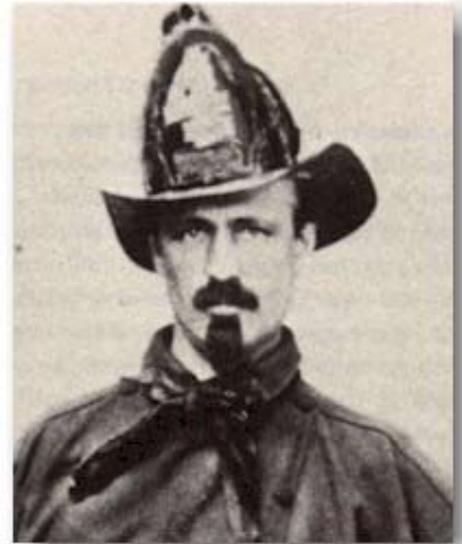
NEVADA DAY

by Guy Rocha

Carson City's Nevada Day parade and celebrations is among the oldest ongoing parade activities held in the Silver State, and, with the exception of Hawaii and West Virginia, is the only admission day activity of its kind in the country.

Regarding the inaugural parade in 1938, the Daily Appeal claimed the event was "Nevada's largest and best Admission Day celebration in the history of the state." Celebrating Nevada Day in Carson City is a long time-honored tradition, but the history on commemorating our statehood predates the 1938 parade by more than 60 years.

The first observance of Nevada's admission Alfred Doten to the Union in 1864 appears to have been initiated on the Comstock by the Pacific Coast Pioneer society in the 1870s. Journalist Alfred Doten of the Gold Hill News mentions a "grand celebration" in 1873 in his diaries. The Pioneer society held a sumptuous banquet on October 31, 1889, in honor of Nevada's 25th anniversary as the 36th state. There may have been other commemorative events outside the Comstock but the state of Nevada did not officially recognize its birthday until two years later.



In 1891, Governor Roswell Colcord signed a bill introduced by Senator Edward D. Boyle of Virginia City making October 31 a Governor Roswell Colcord judicial holiday. No court business was to be transacted on "Admission Day." Both Virginia City and Reno held parades and other festivities. Other towns in the state seemingly failed to formally recognize Nevada's birthday. No tradition was in the making. Between 1891 and 1914 few, if any, communities held observances of Admission Day.

Nevada was still a young state with a highly transient population which may account for the lack of birthday celebrations. Equally as significant is the fact that Admission Day was not an official state holiday.

Only the courts closed for business on October 31. In October 1908, the recently organized State Federation of Women's Clubs in Reno passed a resolution calling for a legislative bill to make Admission Day a legal holiday. Sadly, nothing resulted from the initiative. It would take the state another 31 years to recognize Nevada's birthday as an official state holiday.

In the meantime, the 50th anniversary of the state in 1914 was officially observed. Governor Tasker Oddie issued a proclamation declaring Saturday, October 31, "the semi-centennial Governor Tasker L. Oddie anniversary of the admission of its Nevada into the Union," and a public holiday. Jeanne Wier, the director of the Nevada Historical Society in Reno, worked closely with the governor's office in calling for the proclamation. Reno, the state's largest city, staged many colorful events throughout the day. The 10-year-old Historical Society was open to the public, where the famous Civil War Gridley sack of flour was exhibited.

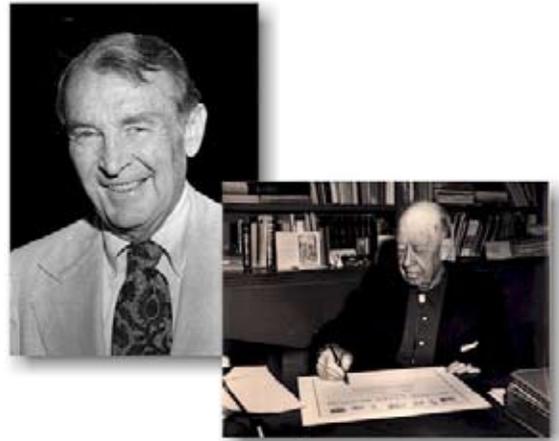


Oddie's proclamation also had called for the creation of a "Society of Nevada Pioneers." In response, a committee of Nevada's oldest residents met at the Riverside Hotel, formed an organization, and adopted by-laws and a constitution. The "Society of Nevadans," as the pioneer group came to be known, sponsored Nevada's Governor Fred Balzar Admission Day celebrations in Reno until the mid-1930s. Governor Fred Balzar issued a proclamation in 1929 declaring Admissions Day a legal holiday and called on all concerned Nevadans "if possible to join in the official celebration to be held in the City of Reno." Similar proclamations were also issued in 1930 and 1931 but they conspicuously did not declare Admission Day an official state holiday.

The State Legislature passed a bill in 1933, introduced by Senator Ira L. Winters of Carson City, which designated October 31 as "Nevada Day" and a discretionary state holiday. The new law "authorized and requested" the governor to annually issue a proclamation for state citizens to display the United States flag and conduct "suitable exercises of a public nature" in observance of Nevada's admission into the Union. While the governor's office did not issue Nevada Day proclamations in 1933 or 1934, the "Society of Nevadans" continued to hold their annual celebration in Reno on October 31. Parades, pageants commemorating Nevada's history and the usual gathering of the pioneers were the order of the day.

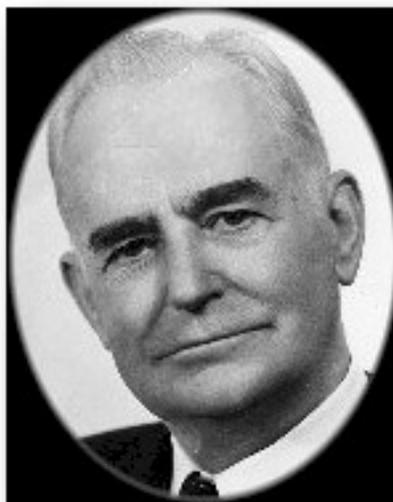
By the mid-1930s, the Society of Nevadans membership had dwindled to a small core group. Most of the early pioneers and members had died. While a Nevada Day parade and other festivities were held in Reno on Sunday, October 31, 1937, it appeared the traditional celebration was going to fade from the scene due to lack of support and economic viability.

Thomas C. Wilson, a Reno advertising executive, and Judge Clark Guild, Nevada Day co-founders, had other ideas. In 1938, the two history-minded citizens, assisted by the Carson City Rotary, Lion's Club, and 20-30 Club, found a permanent home in Carson City for the parade and celebration.



"So well pleased were the visitors from many parts of the state," wrote the Daily Appeal, "that demands that the annual celebration be a fixture in the state's capitol city were heard from every side and quarter." Highlights of the festivities included Governor Richard Kirman presenting 99-year-old Ex-Governor Roswell Colcord a testimonial scroll honoring his many contributions to the state, which included signing the state's first admissions day bill.

Carson City's second Nevada Day, a three-day Diamond jubilee celebration attracting 42,000 visitors, focused on the state's 75th birthday and was a smashing success. Five thousand dollars had been appropriated in 1939 Nevada Day Parade by the state Legislature to underwrite the costs of the "Diamond Jubilee" commission to plan the event. At the same time, a bill sponsored by Assemblyman Peter A. Amodei of Ormsby County had been passed earlier in 1939 designating Nevada Day an official holiday. A large contingent from Las Vegas participated in the event and some 3,000 Indians representing Nevada tribes were involved in the program activities.

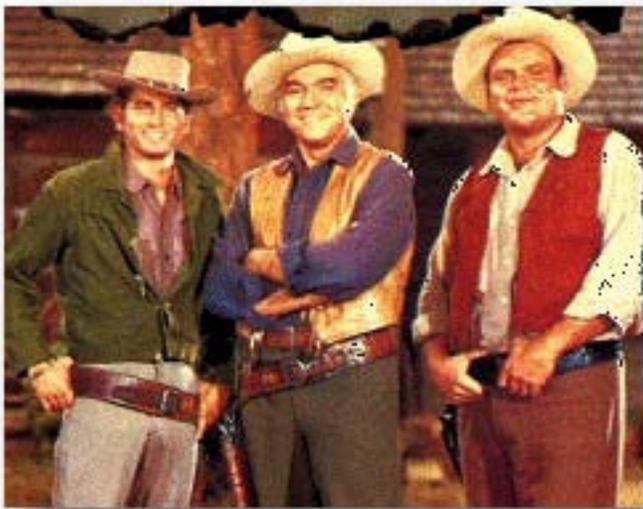


The Nevada Day celebration in the capitol city has been continuous since 1938 except for a break of three years during World War II. Following its return, when an estimated 20,000 people attended the day-long event in 1945, Nevada Day became one of the biggest celebrations in the state.

"The little state capitol was completely engulfed, wrote The Nevada Magazine (not to be confused with today's Nevada Magazine) in 1945. "Some 1,200 people rode the V&T Railroad, which had to charter extra cars in last-minute desperation from the Southern Pacific. Automobiles extended in double lanes, bumper to bumper from Steamboat Springs to Carson City. It was some show!"

In 1948, October 31 fell on a Sunday for the first time since the parade had been held in Carson City. Nevada Day officials decided it Governor Vail Pittman was more appropriate to celebrate the event on Monday. The next year a bill, introduced by Assemblyman Frank Bacigalupi Jr., of Washoe County, was signed by Governor Vail Pittman making Nevada Day an official state holiday only for state and local government offices. All public offices were to be closed; however, school districts could hold classes on Nevada Day if it fell on a weekday. Also, if October 31 fell on a Sunday, then Nevada Day was to be observed as a holiday on the following Monday. October 31, 1954, fell on a Sunday again, but this time Nevada Day officials held the parade on a Saturday. Halloween was observed on Sunday, and Monday was a state holiday. The event was a money-maker, helping to sustain the annual celebration which had lost money the previous year.

The eight-day birthday bash in the centennial year of 1964 was far and away a record-breaker. Tom Wilson, co-founder of Carson City's Nevada Day and chairman of the Centennial Commission, Governor Grant Sawyer had planned the event for three years. The Saturday parade with over 230 entries was three hours long, the longest up to that time (ironically, the typical length of a parade today). Governor Grant Sawyer presented "Adoption" plaques to the "Bonanza" cast and company including parade marshal Lorne Greene, Michael Landon, and Dan Blocker. An estimated 70,000 people watched the parade which was broadcast in its entirety by TV station KOLO in Reno and filmed by UPI crews for California stations.



Michael Landon, Lorne Greene, and Dan Blocker
The only time the parade has ever been held on a Sunday was in 1965. Since then, whenever October 31 has fallen on a Sunday, the parade has been held on Saturday, October 30 (1971, 1976, 1982, and 1993). In 1971, the law governing holidays was amended to designate Friday as the state holiday when October 31 falls on a Saturday.

The Nevada Day parade and celebration in Carson City has become a long-standing tradition and the Silver State's largest parade. It has witnessed Nevada's 75th, 100th, and 125th anniversaries. Now in

our state's 137th year, conceivably the Nevada Day activities during the three day weekend will grow along with the fastest-growing state in the union, the fastest-growing metropolitan area in the country (Las Vegas) and our ever-growing capital city.

MORE TO COME SOON....